

The Home

INFLUENCE OF COMPANIONSHIP

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The power of life over life is something almost startling. There have been single looks of an eye which have changed a destiny. There have been meetings of only a moment, which have left impressions for life, for eternity. No one of us can understand that mysterious thing we call influence. We read of our blessed Lord that virtue went out of him and healed the timid woman who came behind him in the crowd and touched the hem of his garment; again, when the throng surged about him and sought to touch him, that virtue went out of him and healed them all. Of course, there never was another such life as Christ's; yet out of every one of us continually virtue goes, either to heal, to bless, to leave marks of beauty; or to wound, to hurt, to poison, to stain other lives.

We are forever either adding to the world's health and happiness and good, or to its pain, sorrow and curse. Every moment's true living, every victory we win over self or sin, every fragment of sweet life we live, makes it easier for others to be brave and true and sweet. We are always giving out influence.

"No stream from its source
Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,
But what some land is gladdened. No star ever
rose
And set without influence somewhere. Who knows
What earth needs from earth's lowest creatures?
No life
Can be pure in its purpose, and strong in its strife,
And all life not be purer and stronger thereby."

Thus it is that companionship always leaves its impress. Eye cannot even look into eye, in one deep, earnest gaze, but a touch has been left on the soul. A man, well past middle life, said that in sensitive youth another young man drew him aside and furtively showed him a vile picture. He looked at it just for one moment and then turned away. But a spot had been burned upon his soul. The memory of that glance he had never been able to wash out. It had come back to him along all the forty years he had lived since, even breaking in upon him in his most sacred moments, and staining his most hallowed thoughts. We do not know what we are letting into our life when we take into companionship, even for one hour, one who is not good, not pure, not true. Then, who can estimate the debasing influence of such companionship when continued until it becomes intimacy, friendship; when confidences are exchanged, when soul touches soul, when life flows into and blends with life?

When one awakens to the consciousness of the fact that he has formed or is forming a companionship with one whose influence cannot but hurt him and perhaps destroy him, there is only one true thing to do,—it must instantly be given up. A rabbit's foot was caught in the hunter's steel trap. The

little creature seemed to know that unless it could get free its life must soon be lost. So with a bravery which we cannot but admire, it gnawed off its leg with its own teeth, thus setting itself free, tho leaving its foot in the trap. But who will say that it was not wiser thus to escape death, even with the loss of its foot, than to have kept the foot and died? If any one discovers that he is in the snare of evil companionship or friendship, whatever it cost him, he should tear himself away from it. Better enter into pure, noble and worthy life, with one hand or one foot, or both hands and feet cut away, than save these members and be dragged down to eternal death. Young people should beware of the beginnings of evil companionship. It is like the machinery in the mill, which, when it once seizes the outermost fringe of one's garment, quickly winds in the whole garment and whirls the person's body to swift and terrible death.

But a good and true character has also its influence. Good companionship has only blessing and benediction for a life. There have been mere chance meetings, just for a moment, as when ships speak at sea, and pass each on its course, which yet have left blessings whose influence shall never perish. There was an old legend about the origin of the pearl. It was said that a star dropped out of the sky into the sea, and being folded in a shell became a pearl.

"There was a star
Which out of the height of heaven fell,
And was lost, ah me!
The beautiful star fell into the sea,
And falling, was folded into a shell;
And the beautiful star became a pearl
In the sea!"

So it is with the influence of good lives. Words, thoughts, songs, kindly deeds, the power of example, the inspiration of noble things, drop out of the heaven of pure friendship into the depth of the heart, and falling, are folded there and become beautiful gems and holy adornments in the life. Even brief moments of worthy companionship leave their mark of blessing. Then, who can tell the power of a close and long-continued friendship, running thru happy years, sharing the deepest experiences, heart and heart knit together, life and life woven as it were into one web? There is a little poem which asks, "What is the best a friend can be?" and answers it.

"What is the best a friend can be
To any soul, to you or me?
Not only shelter, comfort, rest—
Inmost refreshment unexpressed;
Not only a beloved guide
To thread life's labyrinth at our side,
Or with love's torch lead on before;
Tho these be much, there yet is more.

"The best friend is an atmosphere
Warm with all inspirations dear,
Wherein we breathe the large, free breath
Of life that hath no taint of death.
Our friend is an unconscious part
Of every true beat of our heart;
A strength, a growth, whence we derive
God's health, that keeps the world alive.

"Can friend lose friend? Believe it not!
The tissue whereof life is wrought,
Weaving the separate into one,
Nor end hath, nor beginning; spun
From subtle threads of destiny,
Finer than thought of man can see.
God takes not back his gifts divine;
While thy soul lives, thy friend is thine."

Our friends are also our ideals. At least in every beautiful friend's life we see some little glimpse of life "as it is in heaven," a little fragment of the beauty of the Lord, which becomes part of the glory into which we should fashion our life.

There is a wonderful restraining and constraining power over us in the life of one we love. We dare not do wrong in the sacred presence of a pure, gentle friend. Every one knows how unworthy he feels when he comes, with the consciousness and recollection of some sin or some meanness, into the companionship of one he honors as a friend. It is a kind of Jesus-presence that our friend is to us, in which we dare not do wrong. Thus one writes of the hallowing influence of a friend's pure presence:

"Each soul whispers to herself: 'Twere like a breach
Of reverence in a temple, could I dare
Here speak untruth, here wrong my inmost thought.
Here I grow strong and pure; here I may yield
Without shamefacedness the little brought
From out my poorer life, and stand revealed
And glad, and trusting, in the sweet and rare
And tender presence which hath filled the air."

George Eliot, too, puts a like thought thus: "There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration. They bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become the worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust." Another says: "A friend has many functions. He comes as the brightener into our life, to double our joys and halve our griefs. He comes as the counsellor to give wisdom to our plans. He comes as the strengthener, to multiply our opportunities and be hands and feet for us in our absence. But above all use like this, he comes as our rebuker, to explain our failures and shame us from our lowness; as our purifier, our uplifter, our ideal, whose life to us is a constant challenge in our heart—'Friend, come up higher, higher along with me; that you and I may be those truest true lovers who are nearest to God when nearest to each other.'"

If these things are true,—and no one can doubt their truth—this matter of companionship is one of vital importance. Especially is it important for young people to give most watchful thought and care to the choosing of their associates and friends. Of course, they cannot choose those with whom they shall mingle in a general way, at school, or in work or business. One is compelled oftentimes to sit or stand day after day beside those who are not good or worthy. The law of Christian love requires that in all such cases the utmost courtesy and kindness shall be shown. But this may be done and the heart not opened to real companionship.